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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON IRAQ AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Summary

-- The lead story in all papers today, September 1, focuses on the two bus bombings in Beersheba, Israel. Only one commentary was noted on this event, justifying the bombings as retaliation to Israel's aggressive policies against the Palestinian people. The issue of the kidnapping of the two French reporters in Iraq continues to dominate media coverage in the local print media. Reports highlight King Abdullah's talks with the French Foreign Minister, during which Jordan's readiness to seek the release of the hostages was relayed. Majority of the editorial commentary yesterday and today condemn the kidnapping of the French reporters as a "terrorist" and "stupid" act against a country that has stood by Iraq right from the beginning. A few columnists denounce hostage taking of civilians being done in the name of Islam altogether as a defamation of Islam and Muslims and Arabs in general. A couple of columnists see "American and Zionist anti-Iraq foreign hands" behind the kidnapping of the French reporters.

Editorial Commentary on Iraq

-- "This is not how favors are repaid"

Chief Editor Usama Al-Sharif writes on the front page of center-left, influential Arabic daily in Al-Dustour (08/31): "The kidnapping of two French reporters in Iraq and the kidnappers demand that France cancel the law banning the Hijab in government schools made the issue of kidnapping foreigners for political reason a major issue that seems to have overtaken the grave events taking place in that wounded country. We have always opposed foreign occupation and condemned its motives and crimes, but we are concerned that resistance methods would not be employed to harm the Iraqi people, the Arabs and Muslims. What makes the situation worse is that the kidnapped people are reporters, who enjoy the immunity and the protection that we, in particular, are keen to provide to anyone who puts himself at risk in order to tell the truth. For the kidnapped reporters to be French actually makes the situation even more critical. France is the country of brave stances before, during and after the war on Iraq. It is the country that defends our causes in the international arena and does not bargain even if that made of it a target for the Zionist media machine. What are the kidnappers calling for anyway? France was never a Muslim country that applies the Islamic law so that we can ask it to cancel or amend one of its laws to match our beliefs. The French people are the ones who make the laws and adopt whatever is their best interest. Have Iraq's problems been resolved so that we can now preoccupy ourselves with the issue of the Hijab in France? Do the kidnappers really serve the interests of the Muslim people of Iraq...? France cannot succumb to the demands of the kidnappers and we support it in that, because the kidnappers do not represent the Iraqi people and they are bringing harm to every Muslim and Arab with what they are doing. We apologize to France and its friendly people and we say that Islam washes its hand of this group of misguided people who claim whatever they claim in the name of Islam. We stress the fact that the media and reporters have immunity that should be safeguarded in Iraq and everywhere else."

-- "Kidnapping and arresting reporters is a terrorist and stupid action"

Daily columnist George Haddad writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (08/31): "The gravity of the situation lies in the fact that this kidnapping is being done in the name of the Iraqis' resistance to the Anglo-Saxon occupation and in the name of the 'Islamic Army' in Iraq. This

means, simply, that there is something suspicious and doubtful about the motives behind the kidnapping of the French reporters. France has always stood against the invasion and occupation of Iraq. In fact, this stand has brought France much headache from the U.S. administration, be on the political level or the economic and trade level.. The kidnappers' unduly claim to Islam and to their objective as being wanting to pressure France to cancel the law banning the Hijab in French schools could only be seen as a viscous and stupid attempt, at best, to defame Islam and Muslims. The French are free to do and decide whatever they want in their country, whether we agree with them or not, and they did not come to Iraq, Egypt or Jordan and they did not try to impose their viewpoints on us. Besides, there are millions of French Muslims who reject such methods as being terrorist actions that have nothing to do with the tolerance and good nature of Islam.. Iraq is a war zone suffering from chaos and the absence in security. It is a model situation for misguided people, conspiracies and operations by international intelligence forces to exist. Without a doubt, the American and Israeli intelligence apparatus are lead among those forces now roaming as they like and doing what they like. The kidnapping and hostage taking of reporters is by all standards a foolish and terrorist action that could never serve any cause or come to any good. Imagine when the hostage reporters are friends of the people suffering from occupation and brutality."

-- "The suspicious kidnapping"

Daily columnist Ibrahim Absi writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (08/31): "The kidnapping of the two French reporters in Iraq draws more than a question mark. This kidnapping harms Islam, Arabs and Iraq and opposes the religion, morality and the Iraqi resistance, and thus cannot be done by a responsible Islamic group that claims to be fighting the American occupiers in Iraq. This kidnapping is staged by the enemies of Iraq, of Islam and of the resistance, and is aimed at diverting attention from the actions of the real Iraqi resistance against the American occupation and from the massacres and horrific actions that occupation forces are committing against the Iraqi people. After all, the two kidnapped reporters' task was to expose these American crimes in Iraq. For whose benefit was the kidnapping for those two innocent Frenchmen done? Why do they have to do with the law banning the Hijab in France? Has the battle of Iraq and the Iraqi resistance become the Hijab in France or is it still Iraq's liberation from the occupying American forces? Why did the kidnapping take place at this point in time when the city of New York is witnessing massive demonstrations against the current U.S. administration, against the occupation of Iraq, and against the policies of the neo-conservatives that brought hatred and enmity to the United States? Is the kidnapping meant to steal the light from these demonstrations and ease the burden on the U.S. administration.? The kidnapping of the French reporters is not far from being done by American and Zionist anti-Iraq foreign hands, even it hides behind Islamic banners. We join hands with the Muslims of France and the Arab and Muslim world in denouncing this horrible incident and in calling for the immediate release of these reporters and apologizing to France that has stood by Iraq in its darkest of hours much more than some Arabs and Muslims have."

-- "Consensus against this type of operations"

Daily columnist Jamil Nimri writes on the back page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (08/31): "Kidnapping civilians, whatever their nationality, is rejected and denounced out of principle, but the kidnapping of the French reporters in particular has raised widespread condemnations because France was one of the lead countries to oppose the occupation and continues to be the title for international opposition to American policies in the region.. The international campaign, which included national and Islamic forces in our region, against the kidnapping of the French reporters must be the beginning of unifying the stand against such operations altogether; whatever may be the nationality of the hostages. Such operations divert attention from the real issue, and it is useless to speculate about who is responsible for the kidnapping every time. A strong and direct message must be delivered that such operations are worthy of only gangsters and criminals and not political or military struggles against occupations."

-- "Kidnapping the media: `the Islamic Army' imitates the American army"

Columnist Yaser Abu Hilaleh writes on the op-ed page of independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad (09/01):
"Certainly the `Islamic Army' that claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of the two French reporters does not have the capability to imitate its opponent with its missiles, tanks, nuclear weapons and other deadly weaponry. However, it can imitate it in targeting the media and in the objectives, such as changing the culture of a society by force (the Hijab in France). Demanding the change to the Hijab law is exactly like demanding the change to the curricula in the Arab countries.. Which sect did the kidnapping is not important, because those who did it are Arabs and Muslims who brought harm to their people and their religion by imitating the invading army. These people seems to have forgotten to distinguish between the western media and the western governments, and they seem to have forgotten that the one who exposed the Abu Ghraib scandal was the American CBS.. I hope that when this article is published, the two French reporters would be free. They may not be free and we hope that the worst would not happen. Enough mourning for reporters and enough damage to Islam. The Islamic Army can imitate the one with the upper hand in many things, such as using technology and digital cameras to photograph real resistance operations instead of illusionary resistance operations that target unarmed reporters. The `Islamic Army' is the making of the culture borne and raised by America: a culture of violence devoid of moral controls. The kidnappers know that their people have been kidnapped for more than a decade under the headline of the blockade and the search for weapons of mass destruction. They know their country has been kidnapped by multi-national forces. They know so much.. It is in the interest of the one with the lower hand not to imitate the one with the upper hand when it comes to dealing with the media. Why kind of victory is it that is achieved over the dead body of a reporter?"

-- "The awakening against `kidnapping the innocent': what is the difference between the French and the Nepalese?"

Daily columnist Bater Wardam writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (09/01): "For the first time, the Arab and Muslim world, particularly political Islamic organizations, express a clear-cut rejection of kidnapping innocent people. This is a very important point of transition, because it marks the first explicit condemnation by non-governmental organizations vis--vis the kidnapping of civilians, which in itself indicates the rise of an actual `awakening of the conscience' in the Arab and Muslim world vis--vis aggression against and kidnapping of innocent people and civilians in the name of Islam.. We want a clear and comprehensive Arab and Muslim stand towards crimes of kidnapping and political bargaining with the lives of the innocent.

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We want to see protests and genuine efforts to seek the release of those kidnapped, be they French, Italian, Turkish, Nepalese and even Americans if they are as innocent civilians as the reporters.. If our stand vis--vis the kidnapping of the French reporters was a comprehensive and general stand vis--vis all kidnappings, then it would be a stand to be proud of. If this stand is specific to the French for exceptional political reasons, then it is a stand that political hypocritical, racist and immoral."

Editorial Commentary on Middle East

-- "Beersheba: blood in return for Israel's intransigence"

Columnist Hasan Shobaki writes on the op-ed page of independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad (09/01): "Israeli blood was shed yesterday in Beersheba in a clear message to the Israeli Prime Minister that the Palestinian resistance will remain so long as there is an occupation. The explosions in Beersheba represent a language that is well understood by Sharon and his gang of experts in the extermination, killing and destruction of all that is human. The terrorist scheme that Israel is adopting, in terms of frustrating the Palestinians in villages and refugee camps and the organized crimes against Palestinian prisoners, shows beyond the shadow of doubt that Israel seeks to nullify the Palestinian existence from the human viewpoint, just as it had sought before to nullify it from the geographic viewpoint. The most

indicative of this is Israel's refusal to listen to the voice of the world calling for putting an end to the massacres being perpetrated against four thousand Palestinian prisoners.. The bloodshed series led by extremist of the Israeli occupation forces will not stop as long as Israeli voters insist on selecting leaderships like that of Sharon's, and as long as U.S. elections continue to be governed by Israeli interests and by turning a blind eye to the organized extermination of non-political criminals in Tel Aviv and Washington against a people who are accustomed to fighting back and resisting."

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